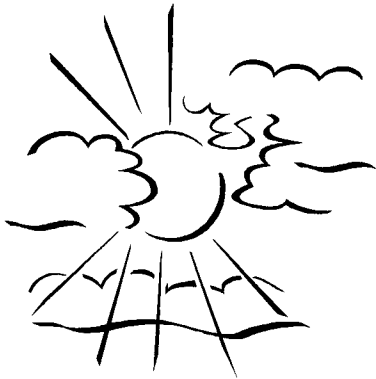


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\*Important story at this spot

# **Articles in Today's Clips**

## **Monday, March 13, 2006**

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# Help is available for caregivers, agencies say

*Web-posted Mar 12, 2006*

*By JERRY WOLFFE*

*Of The Oakland Press*

When an 88-year-old West Bloomfield Township man killed his 87-year-old wife, who had Alzheimer's disease, and then killed himself, the community despaired.

Now Oakland County agencies want elderly caregivers to know they're not alone.

"This is the extreme, but people are very stressed, and they often don't care for themselves," said Jenny Jarvis, communications director of the Area Agency on Aging 1B, based in Southfield.

Jean Barnas, education and training coordinator at the Alzheimer's Association, Detroit chapter, said, "70 percent of all caregivers over 70 die before the person they are caring for dies."

The Community Care Management program of the Area Agency on Aging is intended to assist older adults who might otherwise be forced into a nursing home. To be eligible, one must be 60 or older or at risk of nursing home admission or be a nursing home resident assessed as able to return home if supportive services are provided.

Program services include personal care, such as help with bathing and dressing and light housekeeping, respite for caregivers, adult day care, home-delivered meals and transportation. Costs depend on the income of the consumer. The agency receives up to 100 calls a day for assistance.

The Area Agency on Aging 1B serves Oakland, Monroe, Livingston, Washtenaw, St. Clair and Macomb counties.

One problem is that the elderly often are "resistant to change," said Jarvis, and they refuse assistance from the Area Agency, the Alzheimer's Association or other providers.

It can cost from \$14 to \$20 an hour, or \$336 to \$480 a day, to provide around-the-clock in-home care, she said. Adult day care facilities charge a minimum of \$50 a day.

Medicare pays for skilled care in someone's house for only up to eight weeks, or only as long as a patient is showing continued improvement.

To be eligible for Medicaid services provided by agencies at no cost, a person cannot have \$2,000 or more in assets, excluding a house and a car.

The problem of providing care for the elderly is growing "because people are living longer with chronic diseases," said Jarvis. "If they don't have family, they may not be able to stay at home and end up in a Medicaid nursing home." Such care costs taxpayers an estimated \$52,000 a year per person.

The 85-year-old-plus population is the fastest-growing population segment in the nation.

Between 1990-2000, it grew at a 48 percent clip, with 16,209 people in Oakland County being older than 85 as of 2000, Census Bureau statistics show.

"Assisted living is not an option for a lot of people because of finances," Jarvis said. Assisted living or private pay nursing homes cost from \$1,000 to \$4,000 a month. Medicaid will cover the cost of nursing homes only for the poor.

"Families have to look after families," said Don Rosenberg of the Troy law firm of Baron, Rosenberg, Mayoras & Mayoras, P.C., which has a Center for Elder Law.

"And I tell the families they have to be the watchdogs of their parents. If someone is not safe or coping correctly, there's all kinds of help out there. There's social workers, the Area Agency on Aging, Alzheimer's Association ... but it comes to a point where they don't have appropriate help."

The Alzheimer's Association provides respite, or a break for the caregiver for up to two weeks by providing full-time care for the memory impaired partner. Respite costs are based on a sliding scale up to \$10 an hour.

"There are 5 million Americans with Alzheimer's," said Barnas. "By 2050, a study showed the number of patients with Alzheimer's will triple to 15 million."

The Alzheimer's Association said 10 percent of those aged 65 have Alzheimer's, and every five years that doubles. So, by the time someone is 85, there's nearly a 50 percent chance they will have Alzheimer's and "that's a problem," said Barnas.

**To learn more**

For information or assistance on how to cope with caring for an elderly friend or family member with memory impairment, telephone:

The Area Agency on Aging 1B at (800) 852-7795;

The Alzheimer's Association, Detroit Chapter, Southfield, (800) 272-3900;

State of Michigan Government - Protective Services for Adults, Pontiac, (248) 975-5200;

Center for Elder Law, Barron, Rosenberg, Mayoras & Mayoras, P.C., Troy, (248) 641-7526.

Or visit the Area Agency on Aging 1B Web site at [www.aaal1b.com](http://www.aaal1b.com) or the Alzheimer's Association Web site at [www.alzgm.org](http://www.alzgm.org)

# Breakfast feeds needy in Holland

*Monday, March 13, 2006*

*By Myron Kukla*

*The Grand Rapids Press*

HOLLAND -- Rick Kasten brought a welcome import to town Sunday: a breakfast for the needy he has hosted for three years in Grand Rapids.

Kasten and his group of a dozen volunteers served more than 80 ham-and-egg breakfasts Sunday at the Western Seminary on 13th Street.

Not bad for the first time, said Kasten, who serves 275 meals each Sunday in Heartside Park in Grand Rapids.

"We've had such success in Grand Rapids that I was challenged to do the same thing in Holland. I didn't think Holland had the need. Boy, was I wrong," said Kasten, owner of Lakeshore Glass in Zeeland, who supports the food mission from his own pocket and from donations.

A Holland free lunch program sponsored by Western Seminary and Community Action House in Holland, called Community Kitchen, has served hot lunches five days a week for the homeless, and city residents living below the poverty line, for the past 12 years.

"This is a great addition to what we do during the week," said Kitchen Manager Jim Piersma, whose staff serves about 120 meals a day during the week. "We don't cover Sundays, which means for some people, there's really no hot food for them from Friday night to Monday."

The first Sunday breakfast fare served in the Western Seminary dining hall was scrambled eggs, ham, bread juice and coffee.

Bill Tighe, 36, who is unemployed and a regular at the weekday lunch program at Western Seminary, said he appreciated the Sunday meal.

"It was an awesome breakfast, and a big help for people in the community who need this kind of help," said Tighe, who normally would have tried to sleep through Sunday morning to save money by having one less meal during the day.

"It's not just the food. I also enjoy the community of people here. It's a good place to meet people," Tighe said.

People in the Holland area sometimes ignore poverty there, said Rhys Dudeney, who works for nonprofit Habitat for Humanity, a group that helps needy families build homes.

"I think a lot of people never look beyond Eight Street and Hope College. They see those two places and wonder why anyone needs Habitat for Humanity and food kitchens," said Dudeney, who took part in Sunday's first breakfast.

Kasten started providing breakfasts for people in need three years ago in the Grand Rapids Heartside Park area, where 50 percent of the residents live below the poverty line or are on disability from mental and physical handicaps.

"My son and some of his college friends would take grills to the park and give away grilled hotdogs on Wednesday afternoons," Kasten said. "We were always swamped. One day I thought, 'I wonder how many people would show up if I made Sunday breakfast?'

"The response was overwhelming, and we've been at it ever since."

Oakland County

## **Oakland Co. judge shows he's a friend to kids in trouble**

### **His efforts to change lives rewarded**

March 13, 2006

BY L.L. BRASIER  
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Eugene Arthur Moore learned a lesson early on from his grandfather, a Methodist minister, and his father, a probate court judge: There are no bad kids.

In his nearly 40 years on the bench as an Oakland County Probate Court judge, he said, he has modified that philosophy somewhat -- he has seen, on rare occasion, kids who seem unredeemable, but the thousands who have passed through his courtroom were mostly children in need of help.

They needed treatment, structure or a place to live.

In recognition of his firm but compassionate treatment of children over the years, Moore has been named the recipient of the 2006 Friend of Children award by the Lutheran Child and Family Service of Michigan.

Two others -- Kathryn O' Grady and Albert Mitsie Scaglione of West Port Gallery -- also will be recognized.

The award is granted to people from different professions who serve as children's advocates. The agency selected Moore, in part, for his handling of Nathaniel Abraham, an 11-year-old tried as an adult for murder in 1998.

Abraham was convicted of second-degree murder, but Moore chose to sentence him as a juvenile, meaning he could be released by age 19, but authorities could keep him until age 21. In making the decision, Moore questioned the wisdom of sending young children to prison for life. He made national headlines and received praise from human rights groups and criticism elsewhere.

Abraham is expected to be released from a juvenile facility in 2007.

#### **Instead of punishment, reform**

Moore, 70, said he has seen changes in his courtroom over the years -- more kids come from broken homes; drug and alcohol abuse seem to start at younger ages and the world is a bigger, more dangerous place because of the Internet.

But some things have remained the same.

"Kids need decent parents, to stay in school, jobs, safe communities," he said Friday. When they don't have those basics and show up in trouble, he said, he sees his job not so much to punish, but to reform.

His work is widely respected by his fellow jurists.

"I think he has such a passion for the work, and he's not afraid to speak up and to go out on a limb if he believes things need to be changed," Oakland County Circuit Judge Edward Sosnick said.

He said Moore's decision in the Abraham case demonstrates Moore's belief that "you can make positive changes with the right resources."

Moore developed his passion for juvenile justice when he was a juvenile, sitting in the old Pontiac courthouse in the 1940s, watching his father, Arthur Eugene Moore, handle cases of troubled kids.

He was elected to the Oakland County Probate Court bench in 1966 and has remained there since.

### **Guiding the way to redemption**

He recalled a case involving a 15-year-old who, several years ago, killed an elderly woman during a botched burglary. Moore said he sent the teen to a juvenile facility but brought him back for court hearings year after year to monitor his progress.

He was eventually released and is living successfully in the community, holding down a job. Moore said that what touched him most was that the victim's family came to see the teen's progress as redemption and was able to forgive him.

"It was rewarding to see," Moore said.

With his trademark modesty, he declined to take the credit for the Lutheran award, instead saying it should go to the child care workers, court staff and volunteers who work with troubled kids every day.

"There are a lot of people out there who are dedicated to kids," he said.

*Contact **L.L. BRASIER** at 248-858-2262 or [brasier@freepress.com](mailto:brasier@freepress.com).*

# ISD gets \$150,000 grant from nonprofit company

*Saturday, March 11, 2006*

*By Jaclyn Roeschk*

*ejroeschke@citpat.com -- 768-4945*

Jackson County could soon be making strides in caring for the health and welfare of its smallest residents.

The Jackson County Intermediate School District on Friday received a \$150,000 grant from a Michigan nonprofit company to gather local organizations together to discuss child-care programs available in the county. The groups would work together to help more county children develop mentally and emotionally.

The money will be used to hire a consultant or staff member to organize meetings on topics ranging from child care and mental-health facilities to local schools.

"I don't know that there's anything we can do that would be more important (than early childhood development)," ISD Superintendent John Graves said. "This gives us some tools to keep the collaborative efforts that have been building in the county and hopefully bring them to the next level."

He said the ISD has been working with local groups on the issue for years.

The Early Childhood Investment Corporation was established about a year ago by the state to work with organizations in developing strategies to care for and nurture children 5 and younger.

"The idea is to complete a comprehensive needs assessment," said Mike Foley, chief operating officer of the ECIC. "To get everyone to the table to think through and figure out who's doing what in the county and where the gaps in services are."

The Jackson County ISD was one of seven ISDs across the state to share in \$1.4 million in grants from the ECIC. Jackson's was one of only four awarded \$150,000 -- the highest amount given by the organization.

Marianne Udow, state director of the Department Human Services and an ECIC board member, said the Jackson County ISD was a perfect candidate for the grant because staffers have been collaborating with local organizations for years.

She cited the development of the county's Success By Six program, which aims to prepare children for school.

Udow said such programs that address and assess a child's needs at an early age are key to fostering happy, healthy adults.

"We know that 85 percent of a child's brain is developed by age 3," Udow said. "We have good data that tells us that when you invest in a child there is less crime, fewer children having children and a higher high school graduation rate."



Published March 11, 2006

## **Expert says Ricky's skull not fractured**

By Kevin Grasha  
Lansing State Journal

MASON - For months, photographs of Ricky Holland have shown a smiling 7-year-old boy with blond hair.

But in court Friday, Ricky was a skeleton.

Todd Fenton, a forensic anthropologist at Michigan State University who examined the boy's remains, testified that fractures to Ricky's nose, shoulder blade and collar bone happened around the time he died.

Another fracture to Ricky's face, however, showed signs of healing and had occurred at least two weeks before he died.

Fenton described how he first saw Ricky's remains inside a plastic bag, with a bed sheet, clothes and a diaper.

Tim Holland led police to the remains in rural Ingham County about seven months after he reported Ricky missing.

He and his wife, Lisa, are charged with murder and first-degree child abuse. The preliminary hearing, which began Feb. 28, will determine whether the case will go to trial.

A fellow Ingham County Jail inmate testified Monday that Lisa Holland told her she killed Ricky by hitting him on the head with a hammer.

Under questioning Friday from Lisa Holland's co-counsel Andrew Abood, Fenton said there were no fractures to indicate that Ricky suffered a blow to the head.

But, he testified, the contours of a small metal hammer seized from the Hollands' home in Williamston matched reddish stains found on Ricky's skull.

It is possible, Fenton said, that one or more hammer strikes to the skull caused severe bleeding that killed Ricky. Fenton testified he had never before seen stains like that.

When an image of Ricky's skeleton was projected on a screen in court, Tim Holland wiped tears from his eyes. Lisa Holland looked at the photographs for a few moments before resuming taking notes.

Fenton was the only witness to take the stand Friday in the 55th District Court.

The hearing was delayed about two hours while police drove Fenton to his office so he could retrieve documents and e-mails that defense attorneys wanted to see.

Fenton also testified that Ricky's skeleton indicated he was not developing properly. He put Ricky's "skeletal age" at 5 or 6, even though the boy was almost 8 when he died.

He said that could indicate Ricky was not receiving proper nutrition.

Under questioning from Tim Holland's attorney Frank Reynolds, Fenton admitted that people grow at different rates.

The preliminary hearing is scheduled to continue for at least three more days.

Contact Kevin Grasha at 267-1347 or [kgrasha@lsj.com](mailto:kgrasha@lsj.com).

# Boy had injuries to bones at death

## Expert says break suggestive of abuse

March 11, 2006

BY JACK KRESNAK  
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

MASON -- Three bones in Ricky Holland's face were fractured and he also had broken bones in his right shoulder when he died, an assistant professor in the anthropology department at Michigan State University testified Friday.

The 7-year-old's body was wrapped in a bed sheet, then stuffed into garbage bags and dumped in a field in Leroy Township. A diaper also was inside the garbage bags, Dr. Todd Fenton testified Friday in 55th District Court in Mason.

The break in Ricky's shoulder blade, Fenton said, "is very rare ... but is suggestive of child abuse."

All of the fractures found on Ricky's remains appeared to have occurred at the time of death except one, Fenton said. One of the three breaks near Ricky's nose appeared to have been healing. He estimated the injury occurred at least 2 weeks before the child's death.

Ricky's adoptive parents, Lisa and Tim Holland, are charged with murder and first-degree child abuse in his death. The boy's skeletal remains were found Jan. 27.

So far during the preliminary examination, employees at Ricky's former school in Jackson have testified that the child was always hungry and that they often purchased snacks for him because they were concerned he was malnourished. Neighbors have told police that Ricky had wandered into their homes and raided their refrigerators.

Fenton's testimony Friday supported the notion that Ricky wasn't getting enough to eat.

He said he measured the length of Ricky's limbs, and they were about the size of a 5-to-6-year-old.

That suggests, Fenton said, that there might have been a developmental delay, possibly caused by a nutritional deficiency.

Because Ricky was months away from his 8th birthday when he died, Fenton said the developmental delay was roughly two years. Fenton also said Ricky still had all of his baby teeth at the time of his death.

MSU's anthropologists are called on about 60 times a year to work with police agencies, Fenton said. An expert in osteology, his job is to identify skeletal remains and determine the circumstances surrounding the death.

The preliminary examination for the Hollands is expected to continue Monday in Judge Rosemarie Aquilina's courtroom.

Contact **JACK KRESNAK** at 313-223-4544 or [jkresnak@freepress.com](mailto:jkresnak@freepress.com).

Published March 12, 2006

[ From the Lansing State Journal ]

## **Issue: Ricky Holland case, seeking answers Boy's death should spur citizens to ensure no more such tragedies**

The death of a child is one death too many. While we grieve for 7-year-old Ricky Holland and all the other children hurt by those who are entrusted with their care, we must find the strength to remember within tragedy lies opportunity. We must ask, "What am I doing to advocate for those whose voices are so small?"

Ricky's saga has touched many lives in a very tangible way. Hundreds of caring individuals gathered to search for Ricky. Thousands have followed the news stories about him, kept him in their thoughts and prayed for his safe return. But there's more to be done.

Now is the time to collectively channel that same urgency and concern into action. As compassionate citizens, we are called to impact the lives of children by providing positive environments where they can flourish.

There is always a need for capable, loving foster parents. There are few greater gifts that can be given to a child who has experienced abuse and neglect than the gift of a home. More than 18,000 children across Michigan are in desperate need of a safe home, where love is a value, not a reward; where the necessities are provided by well-trained and well-intentioned people.

Foster parents are needed to build relationships with children that encourage them to find their strengths and use them to become productive adults. Become the parent these children deserve.

Child advocacy organizations want your help. There are many ways you can raise your voice for children.

From a local community organization to national groups, there is no doubt that you will find an organization with the same values as you and a mission that inspires you. These groups welcome help in many forms, from volunteerism to professional careerism. Thousands of children's lives are transformed every day by the caring professionals at these organizations. Find a child advocacy organization to partner with today and begin positively impacting the lives of children forever.

State legislators and agencies need our commitment. Children cannot cast a vote to send their message. It is imperative that all citizens be their voice. Learn about the issues.

Contact your local representatives. Research the agencies that provide services to children. The services provided to children in need are ultimately services being provided to you. These services improve your schools and neighborhoods.

Be an informed consumer. Currently, there are dozens of bills that are being introduced that affect the quality of lives for Michigan's children. Support legislation and initiatives that provide excellent and efficient service to the children of Michigan.

The responsibility of protecting children like Ricky Holland lies in every citizen. Don't be overwhelmed by the depth of what needs to be done to ensure the safety and well-being of every child in Michigan.

The ultimate truth is that there is something each and every one of us can do to change the lives of troubled children for the better, and the help we can give can't wait.

Buy this photo

(Photo by Rod Sanford/Lansing State Journal)

Searching for Ricky: A rider participates in the massive search for 7-year-old Ricky Holland last July. Ingham County prosecutors now have charged his foster parents, Tim and Lisa Holland, with murder and first-degree child abuse. Ricky's body was found in rural Ingham County about seven months after the Hollands reported him missing.

Martin L. Mitchell is president of Starr Commonwealth in Albion, "which operates dozens of programs for troubled youth and their families in Michigan and Ohio."

# Expert: Some of boy's injuries were "highly suspicious" of abuse

By **DAVID EGGERT**

*Associated Press Writer*

*Mar 13, 12:57 PM EST*

MASON, Mich. (AP) -- Some of the injuries sustained by 7-year-old Ricky Holland were "highly suspicious" of abuse, a forensic pathologist said Monday during a court hearing in the boy's death.

Joyce DeJong of Sparrow Hospital testified that she had ruled Ricky's death a "homicide by unspecified means" after completing his autopsy and that a disposable diaper was found on the skeletal remains.

Her testimony came on the seventh day of a preliminary examination for the boy's adoptive parents, Tim and Lisa Holland, who are charged with open murder and first-degree child abuse. Ricky vanished from his Williamston home 15 miles east of Lansing last Fourth of July weekend. His parents told searchers and the media that he had run away.

But in late January, Tim Holland led authorities to Ricky's body in a rural Ingham County game area after telling them his wife struck the boy twice in the head with a hammer. Tim Holland said he only helped dispose of the body, but Lisa Holland said her husband killed him. The Williamston youngster

Ricky Holland's body was found wrapped in a dark blue fitted bedsheet and plastic garbage bags, according to testimony.

"There's a long list of possible reasons why he's dead," DeJong said, including a possible brain injury, suffocation or strangulation. She also said he may have been unconscious when he was placed in the garbage bags, but she couldn't tell that from his remains.

DeJong also was questioned about whether Ricky was the proper height and weight for his age. She said he had a normal growth rate for the first several years of his life, but that, from about the time he was 3, his growth slowed to a rate lower than normal.

The most common reason for that is inadequate nourishment, which she said can be caused by a disturbed relationship between parents and child. She also said, however, that some children can eat plenty, but sometimes the food is not properly absorbed because of gastrointestinal or metabolism problems.

The medication Ricky was taking to deal with his attention deficit disorder also could have affected his appetite, she said. But she didn't come across any complaints of that in his medical records, she said, while there were reports of him asking for or scrounging for food.

She also testified that, when Ricky saw a doctor in June 2004 when he was 6, he weighed 50 pounds. During a subsequent doctor's visit about a month later, his weight had dropped to 42 pounds.

Prosecutors have said Ricky was deprived of food, leaving him short for his age and underweight. Defense attorneys are expected to question whether DeJong has the credentials to make that determination.

Tim and Lisa Holland took Ricky in as a foster child when he was 3 years old and adopted him three years later.

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Michigan

## **Piece of boy's remains is lost**

### **Ricky Holland's tooth missing**

March 13, 2006

BY JACK KRESNAK  
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

MASON -- As sad and strange as the Ricky Holland murder case in Mason has been over six days of testimony so far, the story took another bizarre twist last week.

The Michigan State University Department of Anthropology has apparently lost a small part of 7-year-old Ricky's skeletal remains. Specifically, a tooth.

The disclosure came Friday from Dr. Todd Fenton, a forensic anthropologist and osteologist consulting on the case.

An attorney for Tim Holland -- Ricky's father charged with his son's murder -- asked Fenton about a Feb. 15 report that mentions 24 teeth and the March 7 report that mentions 23.

"I wish I knew where that tooth is," Fenton said. "I'm very unhappy about it."

Ricky's remains -- wrapped in a bedsheet and two plastic garbage bags -- were found in a field about 13 miles from his parents' home in Williamston on Jan. 27. His parents had claimed Ricky had run away in July, but Tim Holland led police to the scene.

His wife, Lisa Holland, also is charged with murder in Ricky's death.

Fenton testified Friday that he found two fractures on the bones of Ricky's right shoulder that may have been caused by child abuse.

He also said there were three small fractures -- two inflicted close to the time of death and one at least two weeks before death -- in the bones surrounding the nasal opening of the boy's face.

Ricky's skull had no fractures, but there were two strange areas of reddish staining for which Fenton has yet to find an explanation.

Ricky was apparently clothed and wearing a diaper when he was killed, although Fenton said he left the clothing and much of the other forensic evidence to others with different specialties.

Fenton said there was one chipped tooth, echoing earlier testimony from a neighbor who had seen Ricky a few weeks before he disappeared.

In response to questions from Assistant Ingham County Prosecutor Mike Ferency, Fenton said the staining on the right side of the skull possibly could have come from the child being hit with a hammer. But the staining phenomenon is very rare and even other forensic anthropologists from around the country he has asked about it are at a loss, he said.

Fenton said the stains were bright red when he first cleansed the bones through a special cooking process on Jan. 28, but that the redness has been fading ever since.

The boy's remains first were examined Jan. 28 at the morgue in Sparrow Hospital in Lansing, and then Fenton transported them to a special room at the Department of Anthropology laboratory on the MSU campus. The area is accessible only by faculty, staff and a dozen or so graduate-level students, Fenton said.

Even members of the maintenance staff are told not to enter the locked laboratory, he testified.

Fenton said an investigation has so far not identified how or why the tooth, apparently not the chipped tooth, is missing. The skeleton also was missing two small bones of the little finger of one hand, but Fenton said that was how the remains came out of the field.

His examination has been meticulous with the use of special cameras and microscopes, as well as frequent discussions with other specialists in osteology, the study of skeletal structures, he said. The examination is not over and Ricky's bones will remain at the MSU laboratory for the time being, Fenton said.

The preliminary examination for the Hollands continues today in 55th District Court in Mason before Judge Rosemarie Aquilina.

Contact **JACK KRESNAK** at 313-223-4544 or [jkresnak@freepress.com](mailto:jkresnak@freepress.com).

#### To report abuse

- To report suspected child abuse, call the county child protective services divisions of the state Department of Human Services. These numbers are answered 24 hours a day:
- Wayne: 313-396-0300.
- Oakland: 248-975-5010.
- Macomb: 586-412-6109.
- Monroe: 734-243-7400.
- Genesee: 810-760-2222.
- Washtenaw: 734-481-9110.
- Livingston: 517-546-8668.
- Jackson: 517-780-7600.
- Ingham: 517-887-9450.

Childhelp USA, a nongovernmental nonprofit agency, offers help to parents and to victims of child maltreatment.

The Childhelp USA national hotline is 800-422-4453.



Published March 13, 2006

[ From the Lansing State Journal ]

Local news briefs

## **Holland preliminary hearing resumes today**

MASON - The preliminary hearing for Tim and Lisa Holland, charged with murder in the death of their son Ricky, continues at 9 a.m. today.

The hearing for the Williamston couple began Feb. 28 and will determine whether the case advances to trial.

A forensics expert testified Friday that the contours of a small metal hammer seized from the Hollands' home matched reddish stains found on the 7-year-old boy's skull.

Todd Fenton, a forensic anthropologist at Michigan State University who examined Ricky's remains, also said Friday that his department had apparently lost one of the boy's teeth.

Fenton said an investigation has not identified how or why the tooth is missing.

"I wish I knew where that tooth is," Fenton said Friday. "I'm very unhappy about it."

# Forensic pathologist testifies at Holland parents' hearing

3/13/2006, 11:19 a.m. ET

By DAVID EGGERT

The Associated Press

MASON, Mich. (AP) — A disposable diaper was found on the skeletal remains of 7-year-old Ricky Holland, a Sparrow Hospital forensic pathologist said Monday in a court hearing.

Joyce DeJong testified that she had ruled Ricky's death a "homicide by unspecified means" after completing his autopsy. Some of Ricky's injuries were "highly suspicious" of abuse, she said.

Her testimony came on the seventh day of a preliminary exam for the boy's adoptive parents, Tim and Lisa Holland, who are charged with open murder and first-degree child abuse.

Ricky vanished from his Williamston home 15 miles east of Lansing last Fourth of July weekend. His parents told searchers and the media that he had run away.

But in late January, Tim Holland led authorities to Ricky's body in a rural Ingham County game area after telling them his wife struck the boy twice in the head with a hammer. Tim Holland said he only helped dispose of the body, but Lisa Holland said her husband killed him. The Williamston youngster

Ricky Holland's body was found wrapped in a dark blue fitted bedsheet and plastic garbage bags, according to testimony.

"There's a long list of possible reasons why he's dead," DeJong said, including a possible brain injury, suffocation or strangulation. She also said he may have been unconscious when he was placed in the garbage bags, but she couldn't tell that from his remains.

DeJong is scheduled to testify on whether Ricky was the proper height and weight for his age. Prosecutors have said Ricky was deprived of food, leaving him short for his age and underweight. But defense attorneys are expected to question whether DeJong has the credentials to make that determination.

# **Police: Father May Have Rolled Over On Infant**

## ***Baby Found Dead***

POSTED: 5:21 pm EST March 10, 2006

A family on Detroit's eastside is mourning an 8-month-old baby.

The incident occurred on Friday at Anglin Street, when the family called police because they found the baby boy was not breathing, Local 4 reported.

Investigators say the infant's father was asleep in the same bed as the child and may have rolled over and smothered him, according to police.

The infant was rushed to Children's Hospital, where he was pronounced dead.

Police are investigating.

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**BOB HERBERT**

# Gross Neglect

When it comes to providing desperately needed services for children who have been beaten, starved, sexually abused or otherwise mistreated, the state of Mississippi offers what is probably the worst-case scenario.

Mississippi gets more than 25,000 allegations of abuse and neglect each year, and it can't handle them.

Way back in 1992 the Child Welfare League of America issued a blistering report about the backward state of affairs in Mississippi. The league warned that vulnerable children would suffer irreparable harm if steps weren't taken to reduce caseloads, increase staffing and locate additional foster care and adoptive homes.

In 2001, Sue Perry, the state's director of family and children's services, warned top state officials that "the crisis needs to be addressed by whomever has the power to rectify the situation — before a tragedy occurs."

She quit the following year, saying in a letter to then-Governor Ronnie Musgrove that the system was starved for resources and had deteriorated so badly that protecting the children had become "an impossible task." At the time she wrote the letter, Ms. Perry was being directed to abolish 88 additional full-time positions.

She told the governor that Mississippi's children had been placed at such great risk that some would die. "I am sorry to inform you," she said, "that this has already happened in DeSoto County. A 19-month-old child was brutally beaten by his stepfather in a case known to this agency."

Warnings don't get much louder, but the honchos in Mississippi were in no mood to listen. These were poor kids, after all. What claim did they have on the state's resources?

Two years after Ms. Perry resigned, Gov. Haley Barbour acknowledged that the state's Department of Human Services had "collapsed for lack of management and a lack of leadership." *Collapsed*. That was the governor's word. Was he serious? Was he planning to do something about it? You must be joking. He made the comment as he was announcing additional budget cuts for the agency.

When a state abandons its obligation to care for its vulnerable residents, the last best hope has tended to be the courts. Enter Children's Rights, an advocacy organization based in New York. Over the years, it has filed lawsuits in a number of states that have led to the overhaul of failing child welfare systems, and it is currently pressing a class-action suit on behalf of abused and neglected chil-

dren in Mississippi.

The situation in Mississippi has become so bad, said Marcia Robinson Lowry, the executive director of Children's Rights, that the state deliberately (and unlawfully) diverts children from the child welfare system by failing to investigate reports of abuse and neglect.

"Mississippi has one of the worst child welfare systems we have ever seen," Ms. Lowry said.

Mississippi doesn't even try to fully staff its Division of Family and Children Services. Caseloads for child pro-

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## Walking away from abused children.

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tective workers are absurdly high. Where national standards call for a maximum of 12 to 17 cases per worker (depending on the types of cases involved), there are counties in Mississippi where the average caseload for workers is 100 and beyond. According to the lawsuit, the average caseload in Lamar County is 130.

In that kind of system, kids suffer and may even die without ever coming close to the attention of the authorities.

The kids who do come to the attention of the system frequently get short shrift. Some are placed in settings that are as dangerous — or more dangerous — than their original environments.

How bad is Mississippi? In the papers compiled by Children's Rights for its lawsuit is a reference to testimony by a key official of the Department of Human Services, who said the state would "not necessarily investigate" whether sexual abuse had occurred if a "little girl" contracted a sexually transmitted disease.

If you don't understand that a "little girl" with a sexually transmitted disease is a raging signal to take immediate steps to protect the child and to launch a criminal investigation, then you should not be allowed anywhere near vulnerable children.

This is the sort of thing Children's Rights is trying to correct with its lawsuit. It seeks nothing less than to compel the governor and other officials to meet their obligation to protect and care for the most vulnerable children in their state. And that can only be done by transforming a system that at the moment can best be described as grotesque. □

Our opinions

# TO THE POINT

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## Parents, be on guard

In a riveting series this week, LSJ reporters Stacey Range and Christine Rook delved into the murky world of online predation. There, strangers chat it up with unsuspecting teenagers. Too often, the strangers aren't other teens but adult, sexual predators. "Harmless" flirtation can quickly give way to attempts to meet and have sex with teens.



The overall message in the "On guard online" series: Parents, know what your children are up to online. The danger in cyberspace is too real and pernicious to shrug off.

The reports offer plenty of advice for parents. And there's a state hotline to call with complaints and tips: 1-877-529-2373. Please make use of it.

# Convicted teacher fights to clear record; many say crackdown is necessary

*Sunday, March 12, 2006*

*By John TunisonThe Grand Rapids Press*

HOLLAND -- By most accounts, Timothy Romisch is a devout Christian and a dedicated and experienced teacher.

He also has a past that haunts him -- a 20-year-old conviction jeopardizing his career.

Romisch, a former Holland Junior High School teacher, is at the center of a new law that prohibits schools from employing teachers ever convicted of certain crimes.

Now 46, Romisch in 1986 pleaded no contest to attempting to accost a ninth-grade student for immoral purposes. He was 26 at the time.

That misdemeanor plea could cost Romisch his 14-year job at Southfield Christian School, near Detroit, unless an Ottawa County judge this week agrees to expunge his conviction.

The case illustrates the early fallout from a package of laws that took effect Jan. 1, all aimed at protecting students. A key provision: Schools are prohibited from employing workers convicted of crimes listed in the state's sex-offender registration act.

Romisch's supporters -- including administrators at Southfield Christian -- say the law does not offer enough flexibility to consider special cases.

Others, including Romisch's victim, say a crackdown on convicts in schools is long overdue.

"If he does get a second chance, who is going to protect our children from him?" asked Naomi Colella of Holland, who was 14 when Romisch anonymously wrote her sexually explicit letters. "I don't feel he should be teaching."

Romisch has asked a Holland District Court judge to set aside the conviction, allowing him to renew his teaching certificate. Judge Bradley Knoll is expected to decide on Wednesday.

According to court records, the eighth-grade teacher has been a model citizen since he resigned in January 1986 from Holland schools. He got counseling, joined a church, married, celebrated his 16th wedding anniversary in September and has four children.

## **Any exceptions?**

Southfield Christian School Principal Philip Ackley sent a letter to the judge vigorously backing Romisch. Friends, co-workers and supervisors believe he is a changed man, wrote Ackley, who declined to comment for this story.

Some lawmakers think there may be room for exceptions in sex-offender cases if a teacher committed a minor offense, such as a nonviolent misdemeanor.

"We are working on some changes," said state Rep. Barb VanderVeen, R-Allendale. "We're looking at some bills that would be cleanup."

One possible change would consider teachers who "made a mistake early in their lives but otherwise have been good citizens," VanderVeen said. " ... My inclination would be this guy might be someone who would fall into these changes."

The new law allows exceptions in other felony cases as long as school officials approve. A popular Escanaba high school teacher -- convicted of fatally stabbing a man 24 years ago -- received permission from his school board last week to continue teaching.

But state Sen. Patty Birkholz, R-Saugatuck, isn't convinced changes will come soon involving sex offenders.

"We all agreed that our goal was to keep our children safe, and if we were going to make an error, it was going to be on the side of safety," she said.

## **Opponents, supporters**

Romisch's case did not involve physical assault. But Colella, the victim, said he wrote her unsigned, sexually explicit letters to her and attached pornography from a magazine to at least one. He also called her at home, still not giving his name, she said.

Colella said Romisch was her detention teacher at Holland Junior High, now called West Middle School. Her mother, whom she eventually told about the letters, called police. Romisch was arrested when he tried to secretly meet her, Colella said.

Romisch resigned and was fined \$200 by then-District Judge John Galien Jr. He faced a maximum one-year sentence.

Colella blames Romisch in part for emotional troubles she faced later in life. She dropped out of school at 16 and struggles with anxiety. At a Feb. 22 hearing in Holland District Court, she testified against Romisch, who also was present.

The Ottawa County prosecutor's office opposes expungement.

"My position is the Legislature has made a decision on these cases," Assistant Prosecutor Sarah Matwiejczyk said. "Whether or not he loses his job is not my business."

Romisch and his attorney, Richard Swaney, did not respond to repeated requests for interviews. He has full support, though, from supervisors at Southfield Christian School, according to court documents. Romisch -- who teaches science and has instructed math and Bible classes -- disclosed his conviction before he was hired.

Officials at the 800-student school believe he has "healed" since 1986 through counseling, church guidance and his family's support. The school is connected to Highland Park Baptist Church. Romisch also taught at Our Lady Queen of Martyrs School in Birmingham from 1987 through 1991.

### **Certification in jeopardy**

Unless Romisch's conviction is set aside, the Michigan Department of Education cannot renew his teaching certificate. Southfield Christian School immediately should dismiss him, said department spokesman Martin Ackley.

Since the conviction, the state has renewed Romisch's teaching certificate three times. Court documents show a hearing panel at Michigan State University recommended Romisch's teaching certificate be renewed in 1992. The panel took testimony and statements from his pastor, his therapist and two others who knew him. The therapist described Romisch as "one of the least likely repeat offenders with whom I have ever worked."

Romisch later received certificate renewals in 1995 and 2000.

Gary Feenstra, former assistant principal at West Middle School and now Zeeland Public Schools' superintendent, recalled when Romisch resigned.

"This totally was a shock when it happened," he said.

He said he could not judge whether Romisch deserves to continue teaching.

"I would say he is paying an ultimate price for something he should not have done. I know he would not have been rehired anywhere in this area, when it happened, with that on his record," Feenstra said.

**Traverse City Eagle**

**March 12, 2006**

**Editorial**

## **Senate votes for secrecy**

The recent dustup over public school employee criminal records is a near-perfect example of how the public's right to know gets trampled by politics and self-interest.

The Legislature last year passed a law requiring that the criminal records of public school employees be made public. When they were released, some them contained errors that in effect accused innocent people of crimes. A judge shut down the process.

The Michigan Press Association worked with the state House to create a bill that would allow schools to list all employees guilty of felonies and misdemeanors. But the Senate narrowed the list to felonies and only misdemeanors involving sexual misconduct.

That keeps a host of crimes secret from parents and school administrators, and guts the aim of the effort.

The public cannot be the last to know.



## Researchers work on background check system for care of long-term patients

The first phase of a statewide background check system developed by MSU will go live April 1, allowing employers to better screen potential employees who work with patients in long-term care settings.

Last year, the state received a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for \$5 million – with \$4.1 million going to MSU – to develop and study a three-phase comprehensive system to improve background checks in facilities such as nursing homes, hospices and assisted living centers.

Gov. Jennifer M. Granholm recently signed legislation she called for last year to strengthen criminal background checks in long-term care settings. This legislation is one of the requirements in the funding to Michigan as a pilot state to develop and study improvements to the system. The state needed laws requiring background checks on those providing direct care to individuals receiving long-term care.

"We must do all that we can to protect our state's most vulnerable citizens in long-term care facilities," Granholm said. "I am grateful to the efforts of Michigan State University in developing a background check system to ensure that people who shouldn't have access to our loved ones don't."

After many months of development, the first phase of the system will soon be up and running, said Lori Post, assistant dean for research in the College of Communication Arts and Sciences, who is in charge of developing the system. Expanded features will be in place this spring and fall for the second and third phases.

According to Post, employers will be able to expand background checks to include all prospective employees with direct access to vulnerable populations in a wider variety of health care settings. The new law requires that the background check be conducted prior to an individual's permanent employment.

As an expert in public health research technology, she will be evaluating the system's overall impact and that of the recently passed legislation.

"Michigan will be able to scientifically determine if the new process is effective in reducing crimes against vulnerable populations. The research focus allows us to test impact and to better evaluate the results of the background check system," Post said.

One of the first steps to evaluate the impact was to determine the percentage of Michigan households with a family member in long-term care. Through a recent phone survey, Post and other researchers determined that 6 percent of Michigan households fell into that category.

"This legislation will be a great help to our senior population. At the same time, federal support enables us to develop an enhanced process that is both efficient and effective," said Post.

Sarah Swierenga, of the Office of University Outreach and Engagement and director of MSU's Usability & Accessibility Center, is testing the system, and James Oehmke, professor in the Department of Agricultural Economics, is looking at its labor force implications.

“One of the research-related goals for the project is to ensure that the new background check process and the technologies built to support it are effective and efficient. We want to design a useful tool for health care workers and background check analysts,” Swierenga said.

Michigan will incorporate most types of providers into its background-check pilot project, including skilled nursing facilities, long-term care hospitals, hospitals with swing beds, intermediate care facilities for persons with mental retardation, home health agencies, residential care and assisted living facilities, and hospices.

In addition to the Michigan Department of Community Health, partners involved in the research project include the Michigan Department of Human Services, Michigan State Police and various units at MSU.

Published March 12, 2006

## **Debate rages over open records laws School employees' crime list latest in battles over FOIA**

By Kathy Barks Hoffman  
Associated Press

Michigan's Freedom of Information Act marks its 30th anniversary this year, but the rules over what government records should be made public are anything but settled.

That was clear in recent weeks as state lawmakers and judges wrestled with whether school officials should release the names of school employees convicted of crimes, and how soon they should let the public have access to the list.

The information is important to parents, and media outlets were swift to ask for the list under the FOIA once the state Department of Education in February sent the list to schools after checking criminal histories of more than 200,000 school employees.

But a judge blocked the list's release after teachers testified that they were wrongly included and teachers' unions said school districts needed time to root out inaccuracies that could unfairly ruin teachers' reputations.

The state withdrew the list, and police are working on a more accurate assessment of school employees with criminal records.

Lawmakers, meanwhile, are working on a bill that would require releasing to the public only the names of employees who have committed felonies or certain misdemeanors involving sex or violence, not those convicted of other misdemeanors.

The changes don't sit well with FOIA advocates who worry that the public wouldn't know about many employees who had misdemeanors on their records. Some teachers say their minor infractions, often committed long ago, shouldn't bear on their employment. But supporters of open government say that makes it too easy for school officials to avoid accountability.

"Would you vote for a school board member if they decided to keep someone (on staff) even though they'd been convicted of the use of marijuana, and you know it's been plea bargained down from selling?" said Dawn Phillips Hertz, of Ann Arbor, who serves as general counsel to the Michigan Press Association. "Schools have not done a good job of monitoring" who is on their staffs.

Some lawmakers agree with Hertz. Sen. Alan Cropsey, R-DeWitt, said school boards should have information about all criminal convictions and then decide whether to notify the public about misdemeanors that aren't fireable offenses.

But Sen. Michael Switalski, D-Roseville, said it's better to draw a "bright line" now on what is released and consider adding other misdemeanors to the list later. "The wise thing would be to move slowly, properly and to protect the rights of the innocent," he said.

Although the debate over school employee records may not have caused such a ruckus if the original list had been accurate, there's no shortage of attempts in the state to lock government information away from the eyes of the public.

Since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, 48 bills affecting open records have been introduced in the Michigan Legislature, and 22 have become law, an Associated Press analysis has found. Nearly all restricted public access to government information.

Last year alone, 20 such bills were introduced. Six FOIA exemptions passed, including two that exempted criminal background checks on nursing home and adult foster care employees and others that exempted proprietary or financial information from businesses applying for state investment funds.

One bill introduced in 2004 would have banned the release of accident and traffic records of snowplow operators employed by government entities. Another, introduced in 2003, would have exempted audio recordings or autopsy photographs.

None of those measures passed. But the tilt is clearly toward closing off public records, rather than opening more of them, Hertz said.

"It's a bad thing," she said. "It's saying that we have to trust government. (But) government is made up of people, and they are no more perfect than I am."  
Where the issue stands

Efforts are under way in the state Legislature to deal with what information about school employees' criminal records should be released. What has happened so far:

- A judge blocked the release of the information after teachers testified that they were wrongly included.
- Once that happened, the state Department of Education withdrew the list to give state police time to compile a more accurate list.
- The Legislature extended the extra time for review from two weeks to three.
- While the legislation doesn't specifically require names to be released, lawmakers are confident that courts will rule the list should be made public.

# **Technology — aimed at aiding in locating missing children — now available here**

By Mark Rogers-Coldwater Daily Reporter Staff Writer

March 13, 2006

BRANCH COUNTY — A service — introduced to law enforcement officers in Branch County — could help authorities locate missing children by getting citizens involved.

A Child Is Missing Alert was introduced by Michigan State Police (MSP) Trooper Mike Sites of the Bridgman post.

A Child Is Missing Alert is a non-profit organization that assists law enforcement in the recovery of missing children, the elderly (often with Alzheimer's disease), college students and the disabled in the first critical hours of their disappearance. The program uses a high-tech telephone alert system to canvas a neighborhood with calls describing the missing person and asking anyone with leads to call local law enforcement.

# New tactic

Saturday, March 11, 2006

Grand Rapids Press

Attorney General Mike Cox fired a warning shot across the bow of all nursing homes in Michigan this week. His Medicaid fraud lawsuit against a Cascade Township-based nursing home chain sends an unmistakable message: Shape up or pay the consequences. The tactic can be a useful tool to go after facilities that consistently violate state and federal standards and subject their residents to poor care.

Mr. Cox filed the suit Wednesday against Metron Integrated Health Systems and three of its nursing facilities located in Big Rapids, Allegan and Kalamazoo. Metron has nine nursing homes in Michigan that received \$32 million in state Medicaid payments last year. Medicaid is the joint federal/state program that helps pay for health care for the needy, which includes many elderly people, and the disabled. Mr. Cox alleges that the homes named in his lawsuit committed fraud by collecting Medicaid payments while providing care that didn't meet government standards. He's demanding they repay a portion of the Medicaid money received, but his goal is to get them to improve patient care. That certainly would be the best outcome for residents of those facilities. Metron has been in the attorney general's sights for a while. Mr. Cox recently charged eight former employees of Metron's Big Rapids facility with a variety of criminal offenses stemming from the death of an oxygen dependent resident in January 2005.

Though Metron is caught in the media spotlight right now, other nursing homes not meeting government standards while collecting taxpayer dollars should face the same scrutiny. Yearly inspections of nursing homes by the state Department of Community Health provides the information need to judge whether standards are being adequately meet.

Inspections of Metron's Big Rapids facility found 27 health deficiencies in 2004 and 12 in 2005, well above the state norm of seven, according to Mr. Cox. The six deficiency citations the Allegan facility received in 2004, ballooned to 21 last year, while Metron of Kalamazoo went from eight deficiency citations in 2004 to 15 in 2005.

Mr. Cox's suit should not only spur Metron to make sure all of its facilities meet state and federal standards, but compel compliance from all of the more than 400 nursing homes in Michigan. That isn't to imply that most homes are negligent. In fact, nursing home work is difficult and most homes do their work with competence, compassion and attention to professional and government standards. For homes that don't operate at that level, however, there can be no patience.

As life expectancy continues to improve and the state's population continues to age -- about 1.2 million Michigan residents are 65 or older -- a larger share of residents likely will be relying on nursing facilities for care. Making sure they provide an adequate level of care will have to remain a high public priority. Elderly or not, each of us should hope so.

Mar 13, 5:04 AM EST  
MICentraL.COM

## Share of Michigan dentists taking Medicaid drops to 15 percent

LANSING, Mich. (AP) -- The number of Michigan dentists willing to accept Medicaid payments has fallen 39 percent in the past six years, putting a significant barrier in the path of poor people who need dental care, advocates say.

The state cut off non-emergency dental coverage under Medicaid for two years, restoring it Oct. 1 for the 600,000 poor, elderly and disabled adults.

But the number of dentists participating in Medicaid has fallen from 1,578 in 2000 to 961 today, according to the Michigan Department of Community Health.

About 15 percent of the state's 6,500 dentists now take Medicaid. And many of the dentists who do participate in the program limit the number of Medicaid patients they take.

"Access is a nightmare," Joe Dzenowagis, who works with the disabled at the Macomb-Oakland Regional Center, told The Detroit News for a story Monday. "There's like almost no Medicaid dentist for adults."

Medicaid recipient Allan Clapp of Flint said it is frustrating finding a dentist.

"I know Medicaid doesn't pay the greatest," said Clapp, who has disabilities and went without care when dental coverage was unavailable.

"But if the only way I am going to receive service is by being an emergency case, that is irritating to me. I am more than a mouth with money behind it. I am a person. I deserve to be treated with respect like any other person with insurance."

Dentists cite low reimbursement rates as reason they do not accept Medicaid patients. Medicaid is funded by the state and federal governments.

"We were losing so much money being a Medicaid provider," said John Buchheister, a Warren dentist who used to accept Medicaid and plans to accept it again soon. "It was less expensive to do the work pro bono and not charge the patient."

Southfield dentist Avis Broussard has not accepted Medicaid for years.

"We decided we couldn't provide the quality of care we wanted to with the reimbursement rates," Broussard said. "The rates were relatively low, and it took a long time to pay the claim."

The state pays dentists \$14.89 for an examination, \$22.10 for a cleaning and \$48.45 for a complex filling. Dentists say those rates are well below what it costs them to perform these services.

In addition, dentists say Medicaid paperwork can be a hassle. Some say that they are frequently asked to submit claims more than once.

Allen Park dentist Jeff Sekerak accepted Medicaid years ago. He said Medicaid restricted the work that he could perform and made him seek authorization on some services, delaying treatment.

"How do we tell a patient who is suffering we can't do work on them because your insurance wants us to preauthorize the service?" Sekerak asked. "We just couldn't do dentistry the way we wanted to do dentistry."

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On the Net:

Michigan Department of Community Health: <http://www.michigan.gov/mdch>

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# **'A complete nightmare'**

## **Dental care gap hurts poor**

### **Number of dentists accepting Medicaid has dropped by one-third, making it hard for many to find care**

Kim Kozlowski / The Detroit News

One agonizing extraction after another, a dentist pulled more than 30 teeth out of the mouth of Henry Lefler, an autistic man whose teeth rotted because of his medication, a serious infection and because Medicaid dental care was not available for adults.

Without dental insurance, Lefler, 27, tried to address the pain in his mouth with his primary care physician, then at a hospital emergency room, before finding care at the University of Michigan School of Dentistry. By then, it was too late.

"It was a complete nightmare," said Nicole Scott, who cares for Lefler at a group home in Washington Township. "His mouth was so infected by the time we got to U-M. The dentists said had he gotten in somewhere quicker, his teeth would not have all had to be pulled."

The state has since restored Medicaid dental coverage to 600,000 poor, elderly and disabled adults after a two-year hiatus, but the number of dentists accepting Medicaid has dropped by one-third, making it difficult for many residents to find dental care.

Out of the 6,500 licensed dentists in Michigan, about 1 out of 4 accepted Medicaid patients two years ago, before the program was cut. Since reinstatement, fewer than 1,000 dentists -- about 15 percent of all dentists -- accept the public health insurance. Many of those dentists limit the number of patients they take, which compounds the accessibility issue.

"Access is a nightmare," said Joe Dzenowagis, who works with the disabled at the Macomb-Oakland Regional Center. "There's like almost no Medicaid dentist for adults."

Most dentists point to low reimbursement rates as reasons they don't treat those who rely on public health insurance, which is funded by the state and federal governments.

"We were losing so much money being a Medicaid provider," said John Buchheister, a Warren dentist who used to accept Medicaid and plans to accept it again soon. "It was less expensive to do the work pro bono and not charge the patient."

Avis Broussard, a dentist in Southfield who hasn't accepted Medicaid in years, added: "We decided we couldn't provide the quality of care we wanted to with the reimbursement rates. The rates were relatively low, and it took a long time to pay the claim."

The state reimburses dentists \$14.89 for an exam, \$22.10 for a cleaning and \$48.45 for a complex filling, which dentists say are well below what it costs them to perform these services. Compounding this problem is the paperwork they are required to fill out, which can be a hassle, dentists say. Some report they are frequently asked to submit claims more than once. This has delayed reimbursements and, over time, cost dentists more in staff pay than what they are actually reimbursed for services.



Jeff Sekerak, an Allen Park dentist who accepted Medicaid years ago, said Medicaid also put restrictions on work that could be done and required him to seek authorization on some services, which delayed his work.

"How do we tell a patient who is suffering we can't do work on them because your insurance wants us to preauthorize the service?" Sekerak said. "We just couldn't do dentistry the way we wanted to do dentistry."

Allan Clapp finds it frustrating that she has difficulties finding a dentist.

"I know Medicaid doesn't pay the greatest," said Clapp, a Flint resident with disabilities who went without care when dental coverage was not available.

"But if the only way I am going to receive service is by being an emergency case, that is irritating to me. I am more than a mouth with money behind it. I am a person. I deserve to be treated with respect like any other person with insurance."

To save more than \$20 million, in 2004 the state axed dental coverage for adults on Medicaid, along with podiatry and chiropractic care. Dental care for the 800,000 children on Medicaid remained.

For two years, activists struggled to find dental care for the poor, and especially those with disabilities, who sometimes must be sedated in a hospital setting for routine care.

Activists also lobbied state officials to restore dental care, noting that it cost them more in expensive emergency room visits and dramatic treatments than it would to provide preventive care.

"Oral health care is primary care," said Kris Nicholoff of the Michigan Dental Association. "We have a job to do and that's to take care of people. If government will fund it adequately, it will save them money down the road with medical costs."

Numerous studies have shown that poor dental health goes beyond a person's mouth. It has been linked to problem pregnancies, complications with diabetes, coronary disease and stroke, said George Taylor, an associate professor at the University of Michigan dental school.

"Poor oral health care can result in poor overall health," Taylor said.

Michigan began to notice medical costs increasing for Medicaid patients because of oral health issues, and that prompted the restoration of coverage in October, said Paul Reinhart, Medicaid director in the Michigan Department of Community Health.

"Both the governor and the Legislature realized the importance of dental care and wanted to find a way to finance the benefit," Reinhart said.

"Dental care is mainstream medical care."

But many dentists note that it was not a full restoration. This year, \$13.8 million is budgeted for Medicaid dental, which is about half the \$26 million in the program two years ago.

The state expects to save the remaining \$12.2 million by reduced medical costs now that dental care is available.

Access, however, continues to be an issue.

Dentists in public health care settings could be reimbursed at industry rates, pending federal permission that is expected at the end of March, Reinhart said.

"That," Reinhart said, "should improve access."

*You can reach Kim Kozlowski at (313) 222-2024 or [kkozlowski@detnews.com](mailto:kkozlowski@detnews.com).*

# **Adoptive Parents Say State isn't Paying Up**

*March 8, 2006, 06:54 AM*

*Channel 6 News*

Some parents who've adopted kids with special needs say the state isn't paying up. A joint house and senate committee will look into those claims during a hearing at the State Capitol.

Department of Human Services officials are expected to testify at a meeting. Lawmakers are looking into whether or not the department is passing along money meant to pay for the medical care of disabled children who are adopted.

# Highfields praised

Lansing State Journal

Letters

March 12, 2006

I am responding to the situation at Highfields Inc. My reaction to the Feb. 22 LSJ article was shock.

Judge Richard Garcia is way out of line.

I have worked in the field of family services for several years now, and have utilized many resources in the Ingham and Eaton County areas. I believe in Highfields. They do amazing work with youth and families. I spent nine months as an intern at Highfields a few years ago. It was then that I saw a magnitude of skills needed to reshape the youth Highfields works with.

Highfields has made a positive impact in thousands of children's lives. Without Highfields in our community, there would be a significant flaw with our family services system in Ingham County.

DeAnn Moreno  
Eaton Rapids

Sunday, March 12, 2006

Daniel Howes  
Detroit News

## When bad ideas make good politics, Mich. is big loser

Michigan's minimum wage battle is basically over, and Big Labor won. The body counting will continue until the House follows the state Senate and votes to raise the minimum to \$7.40 an hour by July 2008, but the biggest casualties aren't Republicans acting like Democrats or the labor bosses acting like labor bosses.

It's Gov. Jennifer Granholm, so desperate to extend her reign as steward of the nation's weakest economy that she's still backing a ballot initiative to amend the state constitution with a minimum wage law -- even though labor likely will abandon the cause assuming the wage proposal becomes law.

"Is she," I asked her spokeswoman, "insane?"

I mean, here's a state ranking dead last nationwide in job creation, whose business tax rate is uncompetitive, whose corporate giants are fighting for their collective lives and whose small business sector needs all the help it can get.

Flip and flop

Yet the governor who preaches 21st-century "World is Flat" doctrine when she isn't sounding like a 1930s-era Luddite is backing an amendment that would index annual minimum wage increases to the urban consumer price index. That would peg Michigan wage rates to spikes in energy prices and interest rates, among other things.

Now there's a winning economic play for Michigan -- tie the bedrock wage rate to global instability, gyrating oil markets and the deliberations of Chairman Ben Bernanke and his pals at the Federal Reserve. Even the boys in Big Labor didn't all agree on this one, I'm told, but, hey, if it'll get Detroiters to the polls in November, then who cares about the long term?

No wonder the Republicans are apoplectic. They see a perfect nightmare: A political winner with voters, if the results of the 2004 Florida initiative Granholm's people are touting is any indication, begets more Granholm, bad economic policy and another black eye for Michigan.

"I can't think of a clearer signal to investors to stay away from Michigan than that," Patrick Anderson, principal of Anderson Economic Group, says of the still-viable amendment drive. "It's one of the most dangerous initiatives for the Michigan economy in years."

Clueless victory

True, which is why the GOP is veering left on this one, figuring it's better to be on the wrong side of the road than careening into a man-made abyss.

My guess is the only people likely to save Granholm and her astute inner circle from "victory" -- and from saddling the rest of us with the consequences -- will be the labor guys who started it. They're likely to get their win legislatively, drop their ballot drive and focus on derailing a taxpayer bill of rights effort.

"The relentless cluelessness of our 'leaders' and certain segments of our population," says Jack McHugh of the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, "just makes me think Michigan may be at the start of a multi-decade decline in wealth and population that won't end until a different generation unsoiled by industrial era baggage takes control."

He may be right.

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# Legislature starts hearing footsteps on minimum wage

Sunday, March 12, 2006

Muskegon Chronicle

If "man bites dog" was once the proverbial standard for a newspaper story, "State Republicans unanimous for minimum wage hike," we think, has got that one beat. And amazingly, it's true. After years of trashing any effort to raise the minimum wage, from seemingly out of nowhere the Michigan Senate's leadership pushed through a pay hike for the working poor, and every senator voted for it.

The GOP-dominated state House, which up to now has never met a minimum wage hike it didn't hate, may jump on the bandwagon, too.

Amazing. Incredible. Call it "Legislature bites dog" or "Lions win Super Bowl."

Should gubernatorial candidate Dick DeVos, the conservative Mackinac Center for Public Policy and the Detroit News get on board, minimum-wage workers may start fainting in Wal-Mart aisles.

Up close and in detail, the right-wing Senate's action is even more out of character.

Not only did senators agree to boost the minimum wage to \$6.95 beginning this October, with jumps to \$7.15 on July 1, 2007 and to \$7.40 on July 1, 2008, they even one-upped organized labor's ballot proposal drive! Michigan's minimum wage has been stuck at \$5.15 for nine years due to GOP legislative roadblocks to a hike for the working poor. Republicans have long derided as a "jobs killer."

Apparently, hearing the footsteps of an angry electorate headed to the polls this November, the "jobs killer" tag was becoming a real fright -- because it's jobs of the elected lawmakers that might be killed.

Published March 13, 2006

## **Minimum wage**

A Lansing State Journal editorial

The Michigan Legislature is sending issue advocates all over the state an important lesson: Petition drives don't have to end in statewide votes to be successful.

This week, the state House is expected to follow a unanimous Michigan Senate in approving a bill to raise the state's minimum wage. If some voters feel a bit caught off-guard, don't blame yourselves.

After all, haven't we been told by business interests, usually aligned with the Republican Legislature, that most people on minimum wage aren't breadwinners, but second-incomes or teens?

Haven't we been told, during arguments over so-called "living wage" proposals, that raising pay requirements leads to a loss of jobs?

Well, legislators are apparently worried about loss of jobs - their own.

A statewide petition drive is under way to write a minimum-wage increase into the state constitution. Such minimum-wage votes are seen as the Democratic equivalent of gay-marriage bans for Republicans: a hot-button issue to get your voters out in the fall.

It seems Republicans have no interest in testing their economic theories - and their political fortunes - against the Michigan electorate this fall.

Most instructive.

# Is this raise enough?

Saturday, March 11, 2006

By Ted Roelofs

The Grand Rapids Press

With child support and rent to pay, dishwasher Phil Sprague did not have to think twice.

Raise the minimum wage?

"You bet I could use it," said Sprague, 39, who earns \$5.75 an hour scrubbing pots and pans at Brann's Steak House and Grille in Wyoming.

"They talk about people out there who are living paycheck to paycheck. I am living day to day," he said.

Under legislation passed with stunning speed this week in the state Senate, the minimum wage in Michigan would jump Oct. 1 to \$6.95 an hour from \$5.15.

It would rise to \$7.15 in July 2007 and then \$7.40 a year later -- a 44 percent boost from today's rate. The plan now moves to the House, where a vote could occur next week.

While an increase is hailed by grocery baggers, hotel maids and restaurant workers, critics said it could hurt small business and result in job losses.

That argument, however, has been suddenly overrun by public sentiment and a political calculus that forced Republican gubernatorial candidate Dick DeVos to endorse a wage hike. A state poll found 74 percent in favor of an increase.

"The minimum wage hasn't been increased in Michigan for nine years and that is too long," DeVos said.

GOP officials hope quick approval by lawmakers will extinguish a Democratic effort to ask voters to amend the state Constitution to raise the wage to \$6.85 an hour Jan. 1 and tie subsequent annual increases to the inflation rate.

Many political experts believe such a ballot issue would likely drive more Democrats to the polls, making it tougher for DeVos to defeat Gov. Jennifer Granholm.

Granholm seized the issue when she pledged in January to fight for a minimum-wage increase.

Even traditional opponents, such as the Michigan Restaurant Association, are coming out in favor of the Senate bill as an alternative to a constitutional amendment, which is described as "radical and extreme" by the Michigan Chamber of Commerce.

Lansing political analyst Bill Ballenger suspects Republican leaders in the capital, the DeVos campaign and the state chamber decided they needed to get behind a wage hike before the popular issue got away from them.

"I'm surprised they didn't do something like this a long time ago," he said.

Still, many small businesses fear a rise in the minimum wage will drive up costs and force tough choices.

Brann's President Tommy Brann said a wage hike likely would force him to get rid of some of the 700 workers at his nine restaurants or cut their hours.

Brann said the marketplace -- and competition -- dictate wages.

"We don't do it to be cruel or be bad persons. We are job creators," Brann said.

At a Subway sandwich shop, Amanda Middlemiss, 22, said she struggles to support her three children on \$7 an hour.

"Especially with the cost of gas and how much it costs for heating. Everybody's struggling," she said.

## **Wage Raise**

### **State House must now do its part for workers**

March 11, 2006

Republicans woke up to reality in a gratifying way this week, as the state Senate unexpectedly moved to raise the minimum wage as of Oct. 1. The House is expected to follow suit next week - and must, to keep the effort from being viewed only as a cynical political charade.

Partisan political maneuvering, more than any sense of social justice, probably accounts for the pressure GOP lawmakers felt in suddenly hiking the bottom hourly pay rate from \$5.15 to \$6.95, with more increases to follow in 2007 and 2008. But the politics clearly aligns with public sentiment to give low-wage workers a better deal. The result is the right thing.

For Republicans, self-interest equates to derailing a petition drive to get a minimum wage increase on the November ballot. Democrats have placed a lot of hope on the measure bringing more of their voters to the polls.

So while applauding the Senate's action, Democrats may nonetheless be quietly bewailing the apparent loss of their bait for voters. Still, they would reap more dividends by throwing all their energies into boosting their candidates, including Gov. Jennifer Granholm's re-election bid. The party, and social justice groups arrayed with it on the minimum wage, also could gainfully zero in on defeating the proposal to ban affirmative action.

The Senate-approved minimum wage bill isn't perfect. For one thing, it leaves the rate for tipped employees at \$2.65 an hour, as long as their tips make up the difference between that amount and the new minimum.

But enacting the legislation should stop the damaging prospect of writing the minimum wage into the Constitution, as the petition drive would. The state's bedrock document doesn't need more clutter, and interest groups of all stripes have to stop making it a political football.

As positive as the Senate's action is, it will be seen -- and properly so -- as merely a partisan diversion if the legislation bogs down. The House needs to seal the deal fast.



## Higher minimum wage warranted, no matter how

Minimum-wage workers in Michigan have reason to be optimistic that their low pay may not be so low in the near future.

To the surprise of most people, the state Senate last week passed unanimously a bill that would raise Michigan's minimum wage from \$5.15 an hour to \$6.95 in October and to \$7.40 by 2008. The move was surprising because it's been nine years since the minimum wage was last changed, and the Republican-controlled Legislature showed absolutely no interest a year ago in raising it.

But that was before an aggressive petition drive to amend the state Constitution with a higher minimum wage began to pick up steam. That proposal, which could go before voters in the fall, would raise the minimum wage to \$6.85 an hour on Jan. 1 and then index it to inflation every year after.

Republicans hope that legislation raising the minimum wage before then will take the steam out of the petition drive — and lessen the number of Democrats going to the polls in November so Republican candidates fare better. A poll released last week showed that 74 percent of Michigan's public favors a higher minimum wage.

The state House, also controlled by Republicans, could act on the measure as early as next week. Gov. Jennifer Granholm, a Democrat, says she is pleased with the legislation but favors a continuation of the petition drive.

Many business groups and businesses aren't pleased with the idea of a higher wage floor, citing the argument that raising the standard could mean the loss of jobs for some people. They talk about the increased burdens on businesses.

But what about the increased burdens over the last nine years for those who make minimum wage? The cost of food, energy and health care have all gone up. Raising the minimum is long overdue.

The state shows that about 90,000 of Michigan's 2.9 million workers were paid at or below the minimum wage in 2004, the Associated Press reported. Clearly, not all of those wage-earners are the main breadwinners in their families, but in many cases they are. While boosting those people's pay to nearly \$7 an hour may not be enough to lift them out of poverty, it at least could help improve their lives. With studies showing that the nation's rich are getting richer and the "income gap" is growing, it's important that the state takes steps to help people at the bottom pay rung. Actually, it's a step that should be taken across the nation, but Congress has steadfastly refused to do anything about it.

It's clear that state lawmakers who have switched their tunes on the minimum wage since last year aren't acting from purely altruistic motives. They seem as much or more interested in political strategy, although Republican leaders are saying it is "the right thing to do."

If the legislation is eventually enacted and the drive for a Constitutional amendment fades, we trust that lawmakers will keep their word and not backtrack after the November elections.

Surely, when they say raising the minimum wage is the right thing to do, they mean it.

If they don't, however, legislators should keep in mind that three-quarters of the public would be up in arms if any increase in the minimum wage were to be rescinded. This is not an issue meant for playing games.

Originally published March 12, 2006

# Poverty top 'moral issue'

By JOHN EBY / Dowagiac Daily News

*Thursday, March 9, 2006 10:00 AM EST*

BENTON HARBOR - Thirty-seven million people waking up in poverty every day in the richest nation on earth poses "the great moral issue in America today," says John Edwards.

Edwards, then a U.S. senator from North Carolina, bid for the White House in 2004, then joined the Democratic ticket with Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass.

He spoke like the 2008 presidential contender he's expected to be Wednesday night before The Economic Club of Southwestern Michigan at the Lake Michigan College Mendel Center. "In a country of our wealth and prosperity to have 37 million people living in poverty is wrong," said Edwards, 52, whose extensive travels the past three years persuade him a "hunger" exists "in America to be inspired and to be involved in something big and important that people can be proud of. There's also a hunger for a sense of national community. The American people do not want to believe that they're out there on an island and when something goes wrong they're on their own."

Hurricane Katrina drowning New Orleans confronted many Americans for the first time with "vivid TV pictures that showed the face of poverty for the first time up close," Edwards said. Many didn't understand why so many people failed to evacuate. "They couldn't," he said. "They didn't have a car, a bank account, a credit card, a way to leave town or to support themselves if they'd been able to. The other thing America saw vividly is the significant extent that the face of poverty in America is a face of color. African American families in our country today average \$6,000; Latino families, \$8,000; white families, about \$80,000. That gap means something in people's lives. You saw what it meant to the folks in New Orleans. Why did the poor get hurt the worst? Those people who live in the lowest-lying areas of the Ninth Ward live on the edge every single day. Bad things happen to all people, that's the way life is ... the difference between me and the people you saw on your television screens from New Orleans is that I'm going to get through it and be just fine. When it happens to them, they're in the ditch and they may literally never get out," Edwards said.

Contrary to the perception that younger Americans don't care, Edwards said when he spoke at the University of Michigan, he was advised to book a room for 100 to 200 and 4,000 came.

Next week he's going to New Orleans with hundreds of college students on spring break to help rebuild. Young people care, he believes, they just haven't been called to national service.

On a visit to Baton Rouge, Edwards encountered a strong, stocky man in his early 40s who was living in a sleeping bag 10 feet away and rising every morning at 5 for 10 days in hopes a truck would pick him up and put him to work. "I lost my home" in the Ninth Ward, he told Edwards. "I also lost my job of 23 years. It's underwater. I don't know anything but hard work. It's all I've ever done." Edwards said, "All I could think of was this guy's what our country's supposed to be about: hard work, responsibility, loves his family. I know that in some places in America the stereotype exists that families who live anywhere near the poverty line are there because they're lazy and irresponsible."

From his personal experience of devoting the last year - "I ended up with a little time on my hands" due to the election's outcome - "driving around this country, including right here in Michigan, with no press, no media. This is what you learn ... mostly you see single mothers. Not only are they working, they're working two or three jobs 14 hours a day for close to minimum wage. They have no health care benefits. Why do they do it? Because they love their kids and want them to have a better life than they had.

"The most striking thing about them is they've never had a champion to speak up for them. We need to be their champion. These women don't want to be dependent. That's the last thing in the world they want. They want to be independent and to be able to support themselves and their families."

"Unless you've been asleep," you probably already know his story growing up the son of a textile mill worker because "I worked it into every speech" including when Edwards debated Dick Cheney in Cleveland before an audience of 44 million people. "My father had to borrow \$50 from the bank to get me out of the hospital and took me home to a two-room house. My parents never went to college. My grandparents helped raise me. I worked hard, but I never could have gotten here by myself. I had help from my country. I had heroic public school teachers. Then I went to a state university funded by taxpayers. What we do together matters. It says something about the character and integrity of the country we live in. I remember so well being a teen-ager and watching Bobby Kennedy go to Appalachia and show us a part of America most of the country didn't know about and didn't want to think about. It's time for us to inspire America again."

Edwards often hears the comment in his role directing the new University of North Carolina Center on Poverty, Work and Opportunity that President Lyndon Baines Johnson already fought the war on poverty in the 1960s only to waste money and create dependency on government handouts and a bloated bureaucracy.

"But we also did some good," Edwards argues. "We cut the poverty rate almost in half, from 23 percent to 12 percent. Things like Head Start, Medicare to provide health care for seniors. These are laws that have benefited generations of Americans, so don't tell me there's nothing we can do. There is something we can do," like raise the national minimum wage to "make work pay."